

2006

Annual Report

MONTGOMERY COUNTY, MARYLAND

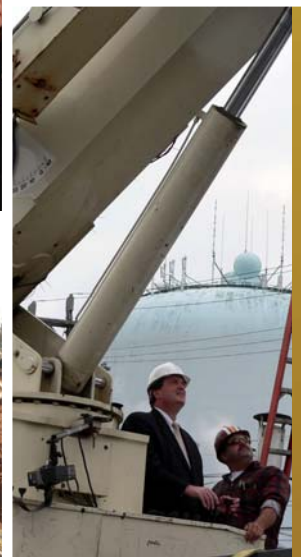
In this 12th and final year as County Executive, I want to express my thanks and appreciation to our residents for having been given the opportunity to serve. Together we have made tremendous progress, moving Montgomery County forward and preparing our community for even greater success. Working in partnership we have built the kind of community where so many want to live, work and raise families – and we've strengthened the foundation to support a good quality of life for generations to come.

The priorities this past year were consistent with our priorities during the past dozen years – education, public health and safety, environmental protection and transportation. We have accomplished a great deal and we can take pride in that. However, we must also recognize that our community, like all urban areas, has challenges that need to be addressed. Our strength lies in the fact that when we come together and put the talent, energy and resources we have here in Montgomery County into meeting a challenge, there is nothing that we cannot do. That is the spirit of this community, and it is a spirit that is strong and unstoppable.

I am extremely grateful and honored to have had the opportunity to serve as County Executive. My three terms in office have been extraordinarily rewarding, and I have loved every minute of the time spent working on behalf of our residents. Thank you for helping to make Montgomery County the kind of community that so many are proud to call home.

Douglas M. Duncan

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County Executive



EDUCATION

During the past year, the Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery College budgets were fully funded. Greater accountability and increased student achievement were gained, along with a narrowing of the minority achievement gap. In addition, greater support for full-day kindergarten – which expanded to all schools this year – along with class size reduction and increased professional development for teachers, administrators and support staff were again priorities in education.

Efforts to eliminate teen drinking and reduce inappropriate behavior by at-risk youth were launched during the year, following a series of fatal teen driving accidents in the fall. The Montgomery County departments of Police and Liquor Control joined Montgomery County Public Schools in launching an education campaign to reduce teen alcohol use. The campaign provided information to the parents of teenagers who were planning and attending parties, and it spelled out the consequences of underage drinking.

A variety of summer educational and recreational opportunities were also initiated during the year to help at-risk children continue to learn throughout the summer months and stay out of trouble.

PUBLIC SAFETY

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina and the Federal Emergency Management Agency's failed response to the Gulf Coast, the Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Board of Directors was asked to revamp the region's emergency response plans, and our own Homeland Security Department reviewed its procedures to ensure that local emergencies could be addressed effectively in the absence of a rapid federal response.

The subsequent review of County emergency management plans and the ongoing emergency exercises for first responders and emergency management staff paid off when a local emergency arose in June. The County's emergency plan worked

smoothly and effectively in the management of the Lake Needwood Dam emergency. Following torrential rain, the dam developed leaks and threatened to fail. More than 1,200 people were quickly evacuated, the lake was partially drained and repair work done to stabilize the dam. A heat wave in July further tested the County's emergency management plan. A hotline was set up to help those without air-conditioning, and fliers in nine languages were produced and distributed to warn residents about the dangers and symptoms of heat-related illnesses.

Two new fire stations opened this year – one in Clarksburg, and one in Silver Spring. The new Station #35 in Clarksburg enhances the safety of residents in the upcounty area. It is located in the Gateway Center Business Park on Gateway Center Drive. A new \$6.7 million, 35,000-square-foot facility for Silver Spring Fire Station #1 opened with space to house a Silver Spring Police Substation on the second floor, offices for the Silver Spring Urban District Crew on the third floor, and room for an interactive, educational "Fire Safety Zone" on the fourth floor.

During the year, a Youth Violence Coordinator was appointed within the Department of Health and Human Services, and a dedicated anti-gang unit was created within the Department of Police. In addition, anti-gang initiatives totaling \$5.4 million were launched, including the opening of The Crossroads Youth Opportunity Center in the Langley/Takoma Park area to strengthen gang prevention and intervention efforts and keep teens out of trouble. The Center operates in partnership with Prince George's County.

The Montgomery County Department of Correction and Rehabilitation and the Department of Economic Development joined efforts to create a One-Stop Career Center at the County Correctional Facility – the first of its kind in the nation. Designed to help inmates line up a job before being released into the community, the center is expected to help reduce recidivism.



TRANSPORTATION

Since January, Ride On has put 45 new buses into service — including five diesel electric hybrids — to expand mass transit service, including along the Route 29 corridor in Montgomery County. In addition, new security measures were added to Ride On buses to enhance passenger safety. Ride On continues to set new ridership records. In fiscal year 2006, ridership was up 8.6 percent over the previous year, with more than 27 million passengers.

A new customer call center was launched by the Division of Operations, Department of Public Works and Transportation, providing residents with a single phone number (240-777-6000) to call for a wide variety of services and concerns, including highway maintenance, traffic and parking issues.

Between September 10 and 17, Montgomery County's Ride On bus system joined nationwide efforts to assist victims of Hurricane Katrina by organizing food drives for needy families. Ride On collected over 11,000 pounds of food by conducting its annual "Give and Ride" food collection program two months early.

In November, construction was started on Montrose Parkway West, a cornerstone of the \$1 billion Go Montgomery! transportation initiative. The new road, scheduled to open in 2008, will provide congestion relief in the North Bethesda area, where 40 percent of the County's employment is located.

The County's federal delegation secured an additional \$24 million in funding for a new Transit Center in downtown Silver Spring near the Metro station. Located on more than seven acres of land, the new center will accommodate buses on two levels, a Metro Kiss 'N Ride area, short-term parking and a taxi stand. The project will also integrate private development including a 200-room hotel, two residential towers with 450 units, and 25,000 square feet of retail space. Construction of the Transit Center will begin this fall and will take about three years.

Protests by County and State officials successfully halted the closure of the Boyds and Dickerson MARC train stations by the Maryland Department of Transportation. A panel is examining the issue.



LIBRARIES

The construction of two new library facilities moved ahead during the year – in Germantown and in Rockville. Both are scheduled for completion this fall, serving as anchors in the new Germantown and Rockville Town Centers.

The new \$26.3 million, 71,500-gross-square-foot Rockville Library is nearing completion at the corner of Maryland Avenue and Town Square. The three-story building will house a children's room, teen area, popular materials center, world languages (Chinese, Korean, Spanish and Vietnamese), public meeting rooms, a Friends of the Library store, circulation functions, and 60 computers using wireless technology will be available for public use. In addition, the library will include adult and reference areas, study rooms, disability resources, tutor rooms, a computer lab, and Ask A Librarian reference services. The facility will provide another 27,400 square feet in office space to house the Montgomery County Public Libraries administrative staff, the Literacy Council of Montgomery County, the Department of Technology Services Geographic Information Systems and the County's Human Rights Commission.

The new \$19 million, 44,200-square-foot Germantown Public Library is scheduled to open before year's end in the new Germantown Town Center. More than 200,000 materials will be available in its collections, and 50 computers using wireless technology will be available for public use. The Germantown Library will feature a children's room, circulation functions, a young adults/teen area, adult area and a staff workroom. More than 170 parking spaces will be available to visitors.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

We continued our commitment during the year to increasing the availability of affordable housing in Montgomery County by earmarking nearly \$20 million for the Housing Initiative Fund. This funding is used to renovate distressed housing units in many of our older neighborhoods and help meet the needs of special populations, including seniors and individuals with physical or mental disabilities.



A STRONG ECONOMY

Demonstrating once again that Montgomery County is one of the nation's most desirable business addresses and the state's largest economic engine, we can report that during FY 2006, 156 companies either came to or expanded in Montgomery County. These companies employ 7,600 people and own or lease 3.4 million square feet of office space in the County. This continues the growth and success the County has experienced over the past 12 years. Since 1995, approximately 93,000 jobs have been created in the County, making it Maryland's largest job center.

In addition to becoming the state's largest job center, Montgomery County has become one of the nation's most diverse business communities. Data released in FY 2006 by the U.S. Census Bureau shows that Montgomery County now has the largest number of women-owned businesses in the state, the largest number of Hispanic-owned businesses in the state, the largest collection of Asian-American-owned businesses in the state and is home to the second highest concentration of African-American-owned businesses in the state. Furthermore, the Census Bureau reported that overall, Montgomery County has a higher number of entrepreneurs – people starting businesses—than any other jurisdiction in the country. This complements the fact that Montgomery County is also home to the most educated population in the United States.

Completing its first full fiscal year, the Conference Center has been an unqualified success. In fact, the demand for the Center has exceeded even the most optimistic projections. During FY 06 that success continued. This past fiscal year, there were more than 1,000 events held at the Center, attracting an estimated 156,000 people. This translated into a net operating income profit of more than \$2 million for the County.

Business services to be located in the New Rockville Town Center were announced early in the year, and the project is moving along smoothly. The 12.5-acre development will include the new Rockville Library and a public town plaza as part of a mix that offers about 650 residences, 170,000-square-feet of retail and restaurant space and three public and one private parking garage with 1,900 spaces.

This year, the County opened its third business

incubator. The Wheaton Business Innovation Center joins the Maryland Technology Development Center in Rockville and the Silver Spring Innovation Center in offering office space and support to help new businesses expand.

Free wireless internet access 24-hours-a-day was instituted in downtown Silver Spring – within the area bounded by Colesville Road, Fenton Street, Wayne Avenue and Ramsey Avenue to the west. The free service is accessible to anyone with a Wi-Fi adapter and laptop computer.

A Local Small Business Reserve Program officially began on January 1, 2006. The program ensures that all County departments set aside a minimum of 10 percent of procurements for small businesses in Montgomery County, and it offers web site posting of procurement opportunities and on-going marketing and evaluation of the program.

CULTURE AND LEISURE

During the year, Wheaton was designated by the state as the County's third Arts & Entertainment District – joining Silver Spring and Bethesda in providing artists working in that area with an income tax break. Designated districts are exempt from admissions and amusement taxes.

The second annual Silver Spring Jazz Festival raised a total of \$22,300 for Hurricane Katrina Relief. Award-winning jazz trumpeter and New Orleans native Wynton Marsalis headlined the event and volunteers from the American Red Cross, festival volunteers, and Montgomery County firefighters, collected donations from more than 20,000 attendees.

The Strathmore Music Center hosted another fundraiser featuring a performance by Roberta Flack. The event raised funds for a Public Safety Memorial in Montgomery County and additional Katrina Relief efforts.

The Germantown Indoor Aquatic Center opened this year at South Germantown Recreational Park, 18000 Central Park Circle in Boyds. Open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m., seven days a week, the facility offers a competition pool, a recreation pool, a leisure pool and two separate hydro therapy pools.



HEALTH CARE

The County doubled its commitment this year to providing access to health care for the uninsured. The Montgomery Cares public/private partnership is now funded with \$10 million that will enable the program to serve 17,000 uninsured individuals. The additional funding expands primary care office visits, provides prescription medications and supports pilot programs for oral and behavioral health. The County also provides care to more than 2,000 children in its Care for Kids program and to nearly 1,100 children at its three school-based health centers. Prenatal and delivery services are also provided for low-income women not eligible for Medicaid.

The Montgomery County Public Health Services continued to develop and test plans to address an anticipated flu pandemic and monitor public health during the year through its syndromic surveillance system. The system regularly reviews up-to-date information from local hospitals, schools and emergency medical services to identify health trends and problems.

The Montgomery Rx discount prescription drug card program continued during the year. It has saved residents more than \$2.6 million. The free prescription discount cards offer an average savings of 20 percent off the retail price of commonly prescribed drugs. The cards may be used by all County residents, regardless of age, income, or existing health coverage, and are accepted at more than 120 pharmacies in Montgomery County.

ENVIRONMENT

For the third straight year, Montgomery County was recognized by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Green Power Partnership as one of the nation's top 10 local government green power purchasers for its ground-breaking wind energy purchase. In April 2006, the County committed to increasing its renewable energy purchases to 20 percent of the County's total electricity use over the next five years.

A Recycling Collection Cooperative program for small businesses was introduced in an effort to increase recycling and reduce costs. The County organized an initial plan for six Silver Spring businesses (Bell Flowers, Hertz Rental Car, Innovative Business Interiors, Plaza Art Materials and Framing, Radio Shack and Regal Paint Centers) to share the costs of hiring a private recycling contractor, allowing the businesses to save money and recycle more.

Montgomery County is also encouraging residents to help the environment by purchasing clean energy for their homes, businesses, and community organizations. The Clean Energy Rewards Program will reward consumers with lower costs for choosing eligible clean energy products. The County's Department of Environmental Protection will implement the program. The enrollment of participants is expected to start in January 2007.

County support was instrumental in passage in the State legislature of the Healthy Air Act, which will reduce toxic emissions from coal-fired power plants.

To celebrate Earth Day in April, the County's Department of Environmental Protection released a 10-Year Sustainability Report that outlines the County's achievements as environmental stewards and details an action plan for the future.



OTHER ACCOMPLISHMENTS

In November, the County constructed a plan to increase energy assistance to low-income households. The plan focuses on helping low-income residents pay for rising home heating costs by doubling the energy tax rebate program and expanding the County's Earned Income Tax Credit program, the nation's first local EITC.

Nearly \$6 million was allocated in the Executive's FY07 budget to fund a series of planning and zoning reforms designed to increase development review and enforcement in the County, following Clarksburg area zoning and construction problems. An ombudsman position was also added to ensure that Clarksburg residents get the community they were promised and deserve.

Shortly after Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast, the County set up a one-stop center to help evacuees sign up for services. Representatives from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the American Red Cross were co-located so evacuees could receive a total evaluation in one place. More than 900 individuals were received at the one-stop center — located at the County's Crisis Center. Health and Human Services staff continues to work

with more than 100 individuals who have permanently relocated to our community.

In February, a Latino investigator was hired for the County's new Office of Consumer Protection, which was separated from the Department of Housing and Community Affairs to better focus attention on consumer issues. The Latino investigator is helping to specialize in consumer protection issues impacting the Hispanic and Latino communities. In March, a team of Spanish-speaking volunteers was enlisted to assist with investigating and resolving consumer complaints and to better address the needs of the Latino community.

The Montgomery County website at www.montgomerycountymd.gov earned two Digital Government Achievement Awards and an honorable mention at the Best of the Web Awards Ceremony which was held by the Center for Digital Government in Las Vegas, Nevada. The Center for Digital Government and the National Association of Counties ranked Montgomery County 5th among the 10 most technologically advanced county governments in the United States. The 22-question survey assessed the County's delivery of information technology to citizens.



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Produced by the Office of Public Information

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